

The Australian National University

Faculty of Arts

School of Art

Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Honours

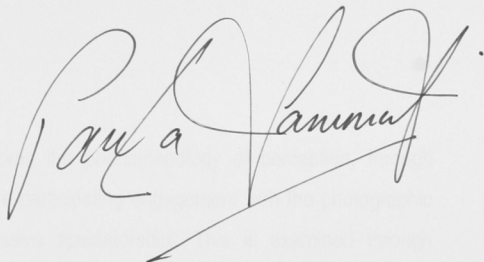
Paula Sammut

STUDIO REPORT

PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS OF THE
Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Honours

2004

' I (Paula Sammut), hereby declare that the material presented here is the outcome of the Honours project I have undertaken during my candidacy, that I am sole author unless otherwise indicated and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, quotations or paraphrases attributable to other authors.'

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Paula Sammut'. The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

STUDIO PRACTICE TITLE

Eucalyptus Botanical Series 2004

ABSTRACT

My Honours Studio report explores the phenomenology of perception, through embodied subjectivity as an active participating engagement with the photographic image in contrast to mere 'passive spectatorship'. This is examined through Merleau-Ponty's theory of phenomenology, embodied subjectivity, as well as through the juxtaposition of photographic images of nature and the environment in environmental activism, along with both Minimalist Sculpture and Painting.

I have referred to the photographic works of Peter Dombrovskis, William Henry Fox Talbot and Anna Atkins, as well as Minimalist artists Agnes Martin and Robert Morris. Contemporary artist's Fiona Hall and Ruth Hadlow are also drawn upon in their use of Botanical subject matter as a means to visually articulate environmental and political concerns.

Studio research has included the use of collected Eucalyptus botanical specimens. Found 3D metal objects, experimentation with photographic print surfaces, traditional methodologies and processes, as well as using a digital environment to construct and out-put final works.

My final studio body of work will comprise 12 large scale photographic ink-jet prints 168cm x 112cm depicting individual collected eucalypt leaf specimens and abstract monochrome prints sampled from the eucalypt specimens in a digital environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express gratitude to my Honours year supervisors Martyn Jolly, John Reid and Denise Ferris. I would like to thank John Reid, Head Environment Studio for his support and for the fantastic field trip experience. I would especially like to thank Peter Fitzpatrick, Head IRF for his advice as well as staff members of the IRF for their assistance in this project. I would also like to thank Patsy Hely, Honours Coordinator, and Georgina Buckley, Art School Librarian for there generous assistance.

Thanks also to my peers and Post Graduate associates for their friendship and assistance throughout the year and with final installation of works for assessment.

And Finally.....

*To the native animals dying in the forests
To the trees who gave them life
I remember you*

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in perception and the photographic image developed from my interest in environmental issues and environmental ethics. In the well known Franklin River dispute of the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Greens featured photographic images in Australian newspapers as advertisements, by Tasmanian wilderness photographer Peter Dombrovskis, of the threatened Franklin River wilderness. The inclusion of photographic imagery as a political campaign strategy functioned as a key pictorial 'referent' and plea to gather public support and recognition to the significance of the Franklin River as an environmental issue, as well as to inform the public, and gather public awareness through the legal process of 'public participation'.



Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, Tasmania. 1979, Peter Dombrovskis.
Campaign Ad-Australian Newspaper 3March 1983.

THE PHOTOGRAPH IN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

The public consumption of Peter Dombrovskis's *Rock Island Bend* transposed onto the public gaze, a transparent photographic account, of the pristine wilderness area and current environmental destruction at hand. Dombrovskis's *Rock Island Bend*, according to Geoffrey Batchen, "is a photograph about the unseen as the seen."¹

¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Terrible Prospects: The Lie of the Land* (Melbourne: National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University 1992), 46.

“Bob Brown described wilderness as, ‘a region of original earth where one stands with the senses entirely steeped in Nature and free of the distractions of modern technology.’”² Batchen argues that *Rock Island Bend* is “full of sentiment and..... moral purity.”³ The yellow badge in the lower right hand corner of the image beckons the newspaper consumer, “vote for the Franklin because only your vote can save it.”⁴ And save it they did! The utilisation of the photograph as a means of environmental activism informed the public of the enormity of the issue confronting Tasmania’s wilderness enabling a change of government and legal precedent being determined for the protection of the Franklin River wilderness.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL EMBODIMENT

My research and studio practice seeks to investigate the way images and specifically photographic images depicting nature, wilderness and environmental issues are internalized and perceived.

My work endeavors to explore an active inclusive sensory bodily awareness or consciousness that maybe present in the consumption and engagement with photographic imagery of nature and the natural environment. I am interested in the relationship between and within the subject as they are confronted with photographic imagery depicting environmental harm or threat that herewith a phenomenological embodied consciousness and engagement is lived and present as a bodily process through experiential awareness. German Philosopher Husserl defined phenomenology as:

the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity. The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Husserl called "intentionality", that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, the property of consciousness that it is a consciousness of or about something. According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, our experience is directed toward —

² Geoffrey Batchen, *Terrible Prospects*, 46.

³ Geoffrey Batchen, *Terrible Prospects*, 48.

⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Terrible prospects*, 47.

represents or "intends" — things only *through* particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc.⁵

Merleau-Ponty followed on from Husserl and refined phenomenological perception further, posing a subjective embodied sensory consciousness through the body's lived experience and engagement with and through the external world. In his book the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty states that,

The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects, and to be continually committed to them.⁶

To have a body is to possess a universal setting, a schema of all types of perceptual unfolding and of all those inter-sensory correspondences which lie beyond the segment of the world which we are actually perceiving. A thing is, therefore, not actually given in perception, it is internally taken up by us, reconstituted and experienced by us in so far as it is bound up with a world, the basic structures of which we carry with us, and of which it is merely one of many possible concrete forms.⁷

An embodied awareness is not so much a response to a situation, or object or image, but of a being and knowing of the body through the bodily senses. It is not based on intuition alone, but through a lived realization, actualisation and known experience of the world. A phenomenological embodied awareness translates onto and may therefore effect the behavior processes of an individual or group of persons, e.g. in the choice of becoming an environmentally and ecologically responsible human being. Merleau-Ponty provided the notion that as well as being intelligently

Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [web site] (Winter 2003 Edition), Edward Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2003/entries/phenomenology/>.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty : *Phenomenology of Perception: Translated from the French by Colin Smith*, (London, Routledge, 1962) 82.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 326.

embodied, we are subject with our environment on equal terms with each other, and that this equivalence confirms our status as ecological subjects.

In the case of the environment and environmental issues the injustice as to what is occurring may be indicative of a greater moral injustice and subsequently an injustice to one's internal consciousness and beliefs or ecological subjectivity. Internal, experiential, and invisible, the phenomenological perceptual engagement with the photographic image is highly active and both affects and reflects (in the lived experiential world), simultaneously an embodied consciousness, beyond the limits of linguistic, mind/body and gender identification.

In his essay, 'For Illusion isn't the opposite of reality', Jean Baudrillard states that, "photographs bring us closest to a universe without images, or in other words to pure appearance."⁸ In contemplation of the photographic, it is not only the object that appears to be the content of observation, to return to Baudrillard, "it is the object which says: I shall be your mirror".⁹

Baudrillard argues that the photograph, "is the object which sees us, it is the world which dreams us. It is the world which reflects us; it is the world which thinks us."¹⁰ In the case of environmental and nature photography is it possible then, that the photographic image in all its exteriority, transparency and rhetoric of fragmentation of reality..... can also be posited as a vehicle through which a sensory self-actualization, remembrance and inner- knowing be realised? In the existence of a phenomenological perceptual process this is possible given that the intelligent bodily knowing is objective and subjective.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL EMBODIEMENT VS PASSIVE SPECTATORSHIP

Given our highly urbanized architecturally built landscape and dependence on external technologies, the human appears removed and somewhat separate from nature and its environs.

In the ancient Indigenous Hawaiian 'Kahuna' tradition the meaning behind the word *remember* is to *mourn*. Through the consumption of images depicting immense destruction and threat to our natural environment and landscape, the viewer of such imagery through an embodied process, may be mourning his/her own potential loss and subsequent mortality along with a sense of great loss for the destruction and loss of the natural environment and habitat. This response reaches

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Fotografien Photographies Photographs :Exhibition catalogue* (Germany, 1999), 132.

⁹ Baudrillard, *Photographies*, 133.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Fotografien Photographies Photographs :Exhibition catalogue* (Germany, 1999), 142.

deeper and with greater implication to the self, than Darwinian survival instincts based on fight or flight reactions. For the phenomenological embodied subject, loss is actualised because of what is to be "conceived as ...[the self's ecological]..... inference in the world."¹¹ Deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions argue that, "..... Self, in this sense, is experienced as integrated with the whole of nature."¹²

The public consumption of the photographic image bears greater significance than mere observation or spectatorship alone. To consume entails usage, getting, absorption or being possessed with¹³, it is active and I argue phenomenological, while in the case of the spectacle or spectatorship, "passivity ... is the means and the end.....[my].....of a great hidden project, a project of social control."¹⁴ Participants engaged as spectators are rendered inactive, passive and therefore powerless.

To refer to the Situationist's rationale, "communication flows in only one direction, from the powerful to the powerless."¹⁵ For instance, Steve Parish's photographs of typical Australian nature scenes marketed specifically toward tourists and holiday makers may be considered as 'passive.'

However in some cases in the depiction of environmental imagery, for instance the *Franklin River Splits*, by Peter Dombrovskis, the public's role shifts from passive spectatorship to that of an active 'consumer' of the image and its content, through phenomenological embodied engagement. This is because of the sheer physical power inherent within the image, "its 'magical', 'dreamlike', even surreal qualities."¹⁶ Dombrovskis photographs reveal "nature as animate, always moving and changing."¹⁷ The embodied subject as consumer maintains their own sense of self and subsequent place and positioning of self in the world.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 405.

¹² Ed. Roger S. Cottler, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (New York, Routledge, 1996) 404.

¹³ Catherine Soanes : *Oxford Paperback Dictionary*; (Oxford , New York , 2001), 183.

¹⁴ Peter Lunenfeld : *Snap To Grid: A User's Guide To Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures*, (MIT Press, 2000), 108.

¹⁵ Lunenfeld, *Snap To Grid: A Users Guide To Digital Arts, Media, And Cultures*, 108.

¹⁶ Tim Bonyhady, "Woodchipping the spirit of Tasmania," *Art Monthly Australia*, no 173 (2004) 35.

¹⁷ Tim Bonyhady, " Woodchipping the spirit of Tasmania," 35.

Plato powerfully stated that, “the real is the invisible.”¹⁸ The trajectory I am eluding to here is not something nebulous, but to something that is real and experiential, that exists within a phenomenological subjective embodied, form of intelligent knowing and reference.

EASTERN ECOLOGY

Eastern thought and more recently physics supports the tenant that all living beings regardless of biology are inter-connected and inter-related; according to physicist Fritjof Capra, they are “manifestations of the same ultimate reality.”¹⁹ The relevance here is that both the inner and outer exist as experience, through phenomena, and as such are all interconnections of the same/one universal cosmic consciousness. To take this further, there is then no duality of what is real but that duality prevails only through the mind and consciousness – both individual and collective.

The Buddhism and Nature Conservation project is concerned specifically with the teachings of Guatama Budda that relate to nature and conservation.²⁰ A well known Buddhists teaching is the *Metta Sutta* teaching, “Thus, as a mother with her own life guards the life of her own child let all embracing thoughts for all that live be thine.”²¹

To live as an embodied subject in and of the world, is to acknowledge other life forms and creatures as also having an inherited place in the world, and as such their being and presence function in equivalence to our own presence and place in the world, and to be without either is unthinkable and unknowable. And to add, “Unless we see or hear phenomena or things from within the things themselves, we shall never succeed in recording them in our hearts.”²² Thus an understanding of perception and the body’s perceptual knowing is a re-positioning of what Deep Ecologist, “Gregory Bateson referred to as, the epistemological error of Occidental civilization.”

¹⁸ *The Aesthetics of Disappearance: Paul Virilio*, (Columbia University, New York, 1991), 23.

¹⁹ Fritjof Capra: *The Tao of Physics* (London: Flamingo Press, 1982), 29.

²⁰ Ed. Allan Hunt Badiner, *Dharma Gaia : A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*: (Parallax Press, California, 1990) 8.

²¹ Badiner, *Dharma Gaia : A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, 12.

²² Ed Allan Hunt Badiner, *Dharma Gaia, A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Matsuo Basho, 191.

COLLECTING THE BOTANICAL SPECIMENS

The initial decision to work with and include found botanical objects or specimens was an intuitive one. In my mind I held preconceived notions of what my works would 'look' like and an indication of the processes that would accompany the 'would be' works. This decision was based on past methodologies tested and preferred. However as would happen, the process of creating and application dictated methodology, as I began to scan found botanical specimens in order to capture detail and render them directly to digital format.

For my part, I wanted to extend my practical knowledge in the use of digital technology as I was somewhat limited in digital processes and software application.

Initially I collected and scanned any and every kind of botanical found object I had collected, be it native leaf, introduced specimen, banksia pod or obnoxious exotic as in the English rose. Also amongst my earliest scans were cockatoo and rosella feathers as well as interesting stick pieces because of the inherent patterning. Later I scanned pieces of bark in varying sizes but thought these not applicable to the end work. The totality of these specimens amounted to several hundred scans saved as high quality jpegs.



Sample of Initial Botanic Specimens as jpeg scans.



Sample of collected and scanned specimens.

As is photographic practice contact sheets were made and upon consideration the images revealed their obvious inherent botanic qualities. I continued to collect and scan my found specimens or leaf litter objects and consider their meaning and relationship to the subject of my enquiry. Leaf litter can be defined as follows;

any living or dead material lying on the soil surface. It litters the ground and is a good thing as distinct from the other litter which is thrown out by humans.....

Plant litter breaks down and in the process provides food for soil organisms and eventually for plants and animals. Leaf litter also protects the soil from erosion and the establishment of weeds.²³



Leaf Specimens as high res tiffs.

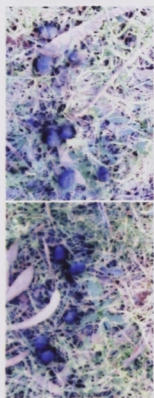
²³ www.OrganicExchange.com.au

I prefer not to consider my specimens as leaf litter, but as botanical specimens. The leaf specimens function as a reference to that which is not readily seen by the eye but known to exist.

About this time I decided to be specific in my choice of botanical objects. My concern for deforestation of Australian Eucalypt Forests and loss of habitat for native animals fuelled my decision to collect Australian Native Eucalypt leaf specimens specifically. For optimum quality I shifted my scanning methodology from jpeg to high resolution tiff files.

The platitude 'act locally think globally,' surfaced in my decision to focus the collecting of leaf specimens to the Ainslie area and Corroboree Park, a small park with an abundance of leaf litter and Eucalyptus Tree's close to where I live. Through the collecting of my leaf specimens and daily visits, I had grown to love this park with its nocturnal visits by Eastern Gray kangaroos, wonderful birdsong and variety of native eucalyptus trees.

What joy morning and evening to collect new leaf specimens amongst the grass and sometimes kangaroo droppings!



K-Poo



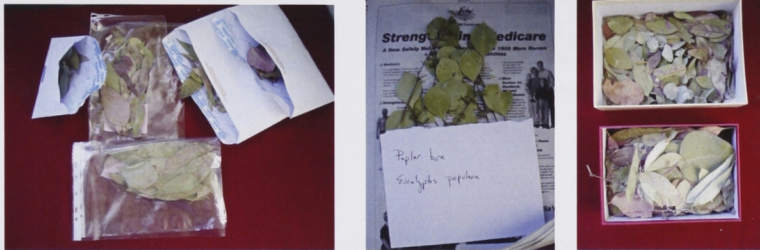
Eucalypts in Corroboree Park Ainslie.

IMPORTANCE OF BOTANICAL COLLECTING

In an on line article, "Rings of History," the meaning and historical reference to the collecting of botanical specimens in Australia is also of interest,

Humans have been collecting and comparing animals and plants since the beginning of time. It's one of the key behaviors that allow us to understand and use the natural world around us. When Joseph Banks visited the east coast of Australia back in 1770 with Captain Cook, he was overwhelmed by the richness, diversity and uniqueness of the plants he saw. He even named one of their landing sites 'Botany Bay' in recognition of the area's rich assortment of plants (botany being the study of plants).

Banks immediately set about collecting as many species as possible creating the first major botanical collection of Australian plants.²⁴



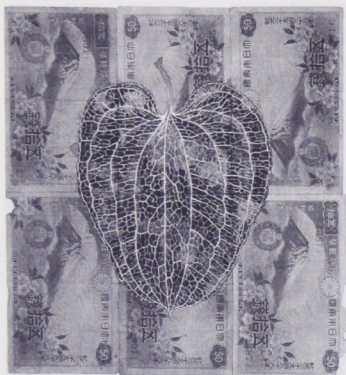
Some of my collected Eucalypt Leaf Specimens.



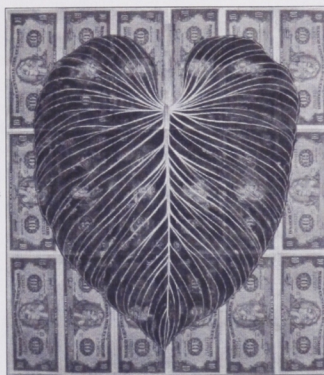
Homemade Plant Press used to press specimens and preserve color. Early in my collecting I found the leaf color would fade quite quickly—I lost several hundred specimens I had stored in plastic sleeves due to poor methodology. Use of the plant press assured preservation of leaf color as well as to flatten the leaves.

²⁴ www.craftact.org.au

Fiona Hall's recent series titled 'Leaf Litter' depicts paintings of botanical leaf specimens painted on country of origin currency bank notes. Through this series Hall explores the "tradition of botanical drawing,"²⁵ as well as, "our interdependence with the natural world."²⁶



Leaf Litter Smilax sieboldi 200-03.



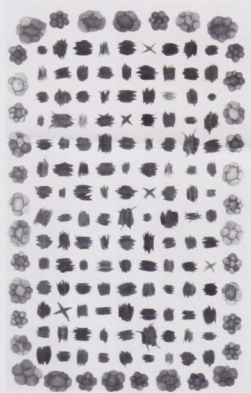
Leaf Litter Philodendron gloriosum gouche on bank notes.

While Hall addresses issues of money, people, place, the environment and politics, Fiona Hall also utilises traditional botanical paintings in a contemporary context. Another contemporary artist who draws upon the botanical in her work is Ruth Hadlow. In *Travel Wagga*, Hadlow incorporates collected leaf specimens from different places and separate journeying.²⁷

²⁵ Dr Deborah Hart, *Fiona Hall Leaf Litter 2000-03* [website] (National Gallery of Australia, 2003) http://www.nga.gov.au/New_acquisitions/2003/hall.htm

²⁶ ²⁶ Dr Deborah Hart, *Fiona Hall Leaf Litter 2000-03* [website] (National Gallery of Australia, 2003) http://www.nga.gov.au/New_acquisitions/2003/hall.htm

²⁷ Ruth Hadlow, "Artist Statement: Travel Wagga," *Wild Nature in Contemporary Australian Art and Craft*.



Ruth Hadlow *Travel Wagga* 1999, acacia and eucalypt leaves, thread, pins 200 x 120cm.

At this time I was reading a book on 18c English female botanists. Historically botany was held to be a leisure activity or amusement for the lady's, where as, botanical science was viewed as a serious masculine pursuit for the minds of men.²⁸ Photography shares its history and origins in the depiction of botanical subject matter. William Henry Fox Talbot, one of the key inventors of photography, used botanical objects in his Photogenic Drawings in the mid 19thc as did the first female in the field of photography, Anna Atkins.



Anatomized Leaves.
Cyanotype. Anna Atkins.



Aspidium Lobatum
Cyanotype. Anna Atkins.



Papavar Orientale
Cyanotype. Anna Atkins.

²⁸ Ann B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters And Botany In England 1760 To 1860*, (USA, 1996)



Botanic Photogenic Drawings by W.H.Fox Talbot. 1839.

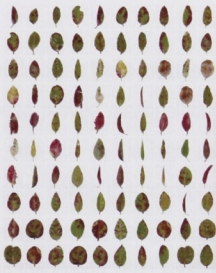
I cite the work of Atkins and Talbot not only to allude to the importance of botanical specimens and early photographic methodologies but also to exemplify the importance of process to enable my works to be realised. In the rendition of a digital image, process is often disregarded or negated due to the immediacy digital technology allows. I felt accountable to a process that would determine the trajectory and outcome of the completed body of work. This can be likened to minimalist artist Robert Morris who allowed the materials and process to dictate and give meaning to his completed works.

MINIMALISM & THE GRID

In the early stages in considering the representation of the botanical specimens, it became clear that the botanical aesthetic would form as a strong feature and aspect of the work. At this time my process lead to the addition of a grid or square, an almost transparent motif as in the mirrored windows of city buildings, of equal proportions measuring 10 rows w by 10 rows across, being 100 grids in totality. The grids were constructed individually and directly in a digital environment.

I considered the grid to be a metaphor and referent to the architectural spatial relationship to the human body and its effect on the phenomenology of subjectivity of being able to function in the world. Rosalind Krauss argues that the grid is “anti-natural, anti-mimetic and anti-real.”²⁹

In these works the grid also implies the domination of architecture over the natural landscape and its inclusion as a motif is a reminder to the compression of space that ensues for all living beings and creatures, even when significant threat to animal and plant species exists as determined by environmental impact assessments.



Eucalypt Panel # 1
Rag Paper 76cm x 56 cm 2004



Eucalypt Panel # 2
Rag Paper 76 cm x 56 cm 2004

(In all 4 Eucalypt Panels were constructed to form grids @ 100 leaves x 100 grids. The function of these was to visualize thought processes concerning spatial relationships between architecture, the body & nature.)

The construction of the grid as being a separate and considered process is integral to the outcome and perception of the early process works. The unification of the grid with the individual leaf specimen may also signal the ecological relationship between nature and human, of the collection and reformation or harkening to a disparate fragmented self? Although obvious in its botanic structure, the collecting and collection of the leaf specimens forms as a distinct process of the work and is not an end in itself. However the works can also be viewed as separate completed works in themselves. There are five works in all. I have titled them panels No 1- No 5. Final output was to print on Arches Hot Pressed Watercolor Rag Paper. This decision was based on the assimilation of the ink onto the paper, whereas initial tests on Arches cold pressed paper failed due to the ink

²⁹ Rosalind Krauss, *Grids: Format and Image in 20th Century Art*: (New York, The Pace Gallery, 1979) 1.

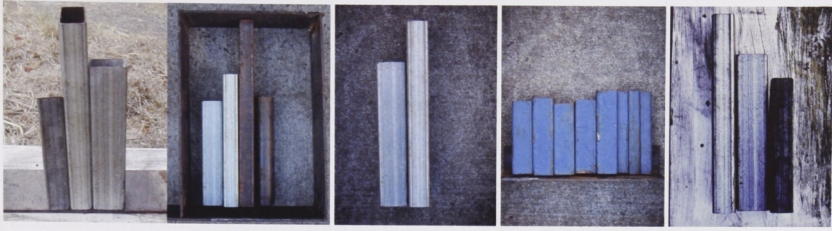
bleeding into the textured surface. Tests on traditional photographic papers failed the subject matter also due to the choice of paper surface e.g. satin. I considered the botanical subject matter rendered flat in appearance and color saturation by comparison with the Arches Paper. At this time I also tested to print a large size single leaf specimen output to standard poster size on Arches Hot & Cold pressed rag paper. The result was disappointing from a technical position (muddied bleed of ink to paper surface/ paper texture etc) – and it is envisaged such issues can be resolved in second semester through the further investigation of photographic out-put surfaces e.g. Rough Text Archival Photographic Paper.

Scanning methodologies have included 35mm slide photographs of leaf specimens shot through a macro lens, these proved disappointing as did use of direct scans of specimens to a high end scanner. This was due to the high sensitivity of the flat bed scanner and the inability to adjust depth of field ratios during the scan process due to individual leaf specimens not being absolutely flat in part, although having being pressed in a plant press for some time. To resolve this problem I reverted back to the Epson 1660 scanning at a higher resolution than previously trialed. Test prints yielded positive results and from here a clear decision was made as to the correct scanning methodology to meet my out-put requirements.

FOUND METAL OBJECTS

The impetus to assemble and photograph found metal objects forms an integral part of this research project and art making process. The objects represented visually demonstrate albeit metaphorically the spatial relationship between architecture and the human body. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the body “inhabits space and time.”³⁰ This can also be applied to architecture however from a phenomenological embodied position I was considering the compression of the body and relationship to space to both human and non-human species. These images serve as a visual notation to ideas that inform this series of works.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomonology of Perception*, 139.



Found Object Assemblages 2004.

COLOUR SAMPLING

The digital realm of creation harbors infinite possibilities both real and imagined. As mentioned earlier I had challenged myself this year to finally embrace digital technologies and create a body of work solely through this exploration. The notion of sampling supports and extends the phenomenal perceptual element within the final body of work and research project.

This exploration initially entailed random sampling from the leaf specimens used in the preceding panels constructed to form a color grid or color swatch sample. In totality three A3 proofs comprising 300 individual samples were constructed. Later explorations included the use of multiple shades of color to form a single image however; this decision was found to be irrelevant and ambiguous to the inherent meaning of the work and therefore discarded.



1-3 Eucalypt Panels

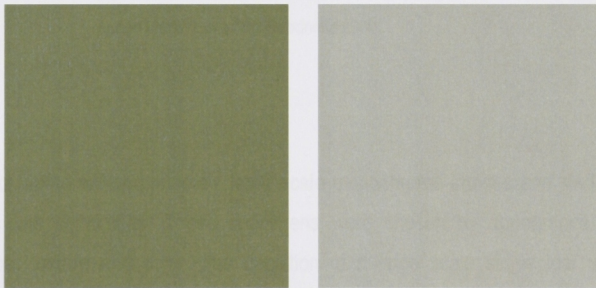
Each 100 colour samples

Initial Grid Eucalypt Samples 2004.

THE MONOCHROME GOES DIGITAL

The monochrome lends itself to the visual representation of phenomenology as there lacks a clear distinction between the subject and object relationship within and to the work from the viewer. Within the same space both exist simultaneously. Robert Morris employed a phenomenological reference and inquiry in his sculptural works in order to “theorise... a co-extensive spectatorship, a perception that encompassed, that made inextricable, the body and what it perceives.”³¹

Final leaf monochrome prints sampled from the eucalyptus leaf specimens are rectangular in form to align with the body and reference the verticality of the botanical leaf specimens as well as Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of an embodied ecological subjectivity. Shades of green, pink are depicted in subtle tones. The tonality of the images is the element that substantiates the form and essence of the works. Minimalist artists deployed this characteristic with the intention that the materials used in the works form part of the subject. Minimalist art is said to “epitomise a world without fragmentation, a world of seamless unity”³² The strategy of reducing the eucalypt leaf specimen to its inherent color not only is a statement on what is not readily seen, but also functions to inform the viewing subject that perception extends beyond the visual through the body’s phenomenal engagement with the work. It is through the embodied subjectivity of experiencing the work that gives the work its presence. This presence refers the viewer to engage with the work in that it “can make its presence felt, demanding the viewers attention.”³³



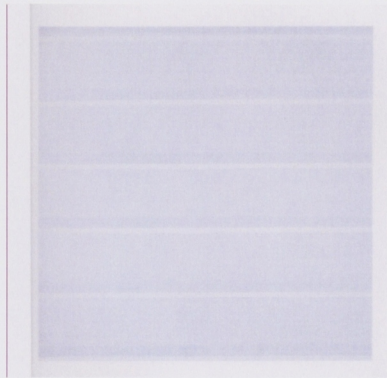
Eucalyptus Monochrome in Green 2004.

³¹ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art And Polemics In The Sixties*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001) 161.

³² David Batchelor, *Minimalism*, (London, Tate Gallery, 1997) 8.

³³ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art And Polemics In The Sixties*, 232.

Agnes Martin is another minimalist artist who employed a reductive methodology in her abstract monochrome paintings. Critics had said of her works that they were, "barely perceptible, often approaching invisibility, [her art] heightened the demands of the viewer's level of consciousness and receptivity."³⁴ Agnes Martin wanted people to experience her art to embody intentionality behind the paintings themselves. Of importance to Martin was the employment of the square or grid as being "non-hierarchic and non-relational."³⁵ Martin held the belief of equality and reverence for all of life and that ultimately through existence all of life is inter-connected. Through her paintings, Martin regarded "art as a mode of developing awareness or heightening perception...as a vehicle of revelation."³⁶



Agnes Martin Love And Goodness 2000.

Completed body of works will comprise six large scale monochrome images and six large scale single eucalyptus leaf specimens. These specimens were chosen by appearance based on elements of shape, texture and color. The depiction of a large scale single leaf asserts the equivalence between the human as an ecologically embodied subject to nature and the world.

³⁴ Barbara Haskell, *Agnes Martin*: (New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992) 149.

³⁵ Barbara Haskell, *Agnes Martin*:

³⁶ Barbara Haskell, *Agnes Martin*: 135.

Final print out-put will be on alternative photographic paper known as Photographic Rough Text paper. Rough Text paper is bright white, archival, weighty and textured with a photographic base. In choosing this paper over other photographic surfaces both a technical and aesthetic decision was made. It was also important to maintain the Botanical integrity of the works.

Exhibition works are to be pinned direct to gallery wall.

FINAL PRINTS



Eucalypt # 1
168cm x 112cm 2004



Eucalypt Monochrome #1
168cm x 112cm 2004



Eucalypt Monochrome # 2
168 x 112cm 2004



Eucalypt # 2
168 x 112 cm 2004



Eucalypt # 3



Eucalypt Monochrome # 3



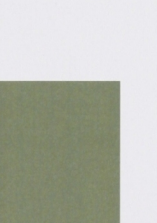
Eucalypt Monochrome # 4



Eucalypt # 4



Eucalypt # 5



Eucalypt Monochrome # 5



Eucalypt Monochrome # 6



Eucalypt # 6

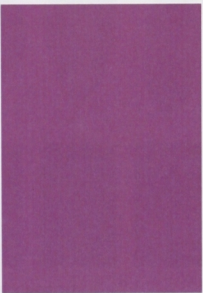
CONCLUSION

My Honours project is an attempt to investigate and question photographic consumption practices particularly in some photographic depictions of nature and environmental activism. Obviously, due to the limitations of this project further discussion and debate is not possible here. My trajectory in the perception of images, specifically those of nature and the environment cited in this exploration, extends beyond models of passive spectatorship to include Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodied subjective perception. This method of perception is experienced through the body's engagement and phenomenal intelligence. Subsequently in the case of the Peter Dombrovskis, *Franklin River Rock Island Bend*, the photographic image as environmental activist, imbued an ecological subjectivity actualized through bodily phenomenal perceptual equivalence, into the hearts and minds of the audience who actively engaged with it.

PauLa Sammut



Eucalypt #1 150cm x 100cm
from the *Eucalyptus Botanical Series* 2004



Eucalypt #1 Monochrome 150cm x 100cm
from the *Eucalyptus Botanical Series* 2004

Exhibition Post – Card #1

ARTS & CRAFTS

Botanical

Art & Craft Series

Botanical Series

Botanical Series



paula sammut

from the

Eucalyptus Botanical Series 2004

Exhibition Post – Card # 2

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Honours Proposal update

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HONOURS PROPOSAL UPDATE

PROJECT AIMS

The aim of my honours project is to produce a body of work that investigates the use of the photograph in persuading public awareness to environmental issues and its effect in creating an environmental consciousness. I am interested in the subject's perception of visual images depicting nature and the environment. I also aim to extend my visual practice and expertise to include the use of digital technology for the first time.

RESEARCH TO DATE

METHODS AND MATERIALS:

My working /research methods comprise the use of found objects and leaf specimens from native eucalypt trees close to where I live. I have collected close to a thousand specimens and have chosen to utilize the scanner as a high resolution (1200/1600dpi) image simulator. I have also made digital images and 35mm still images of both the Eucalypt tress and leafs represented in the works as well as other Eucalypts from Mount Ainslie Nature Park and the Meroo National Park on the south coast of NSW.

Proofs were made of the initial scanned specimens. Assemblages of the found objects were digitally photographed emulating architectural landscapes. These assemblages function as a visual reference and form part of my investigative process in considering space and spatial relationships. Using the digital environment I constructed a series of grids 10 across by 10 down to measure 85cm H and 105cm V. (initial size 60cm by 100cm then 100cm by 100cm) The scanned objects (leafs), were then placed upon the grid to represent opposing ideas and relationship between subject and object – nature and matter, the unseen or ephemeral. This relationship then translates onto the viewer. The final stage of my investigation has been to create digital color samples from some of the leaf scans to form a series of individual color grids. From here my intention is to further develop this process.

I have tested various paper surfaces to inkjet output. Final works comprise the use of Arches Hot Pressed Rag Paper 56cm by 76cm. Initial tests on Arches Cold Pressed Paper proved unsuccessful due to excessive ink bleeding. At this stage I have had to compromise print output size to meet paper size, to test color ink saturation and to achieve a working color profile with Photomedia technical staff.

RESOURCES & SKILLS:

To make possible this body of work I have been challenged technically in the use and application of digital technology i.e. resolution to output, file size and Photoshop. I have had to consult Denise Ferris, and Photomedia technical staff to resolve digital issues.

I probably require further Photoshop technical assistance in order to fully realize my project as my previous working methodology relied on traditional photographic practices.

CONTEXT:

My current body of work reflects my concern with environmental issues. My work aims to raise awareness concerning the deforestation of native Eucalypt Forests, the threat to biodiversity, species and habitat. I am interested in environmental ethics and broader ecological and spiritual values. Initially my enquiry began in considering the use of the Peter Dombrovskis key image of the splits in the Franklin Dam case, a pristine area of wilderness and part of the Franklin River proposed for re-development. I am interested in the way nature and images of nature are perceived, and the subsequent meaning or relevance to the viewer. I am investigating theories of visual perception as well as notions of desire and experiential body-consciousness. In my readings I am referring to the writings of Barthes, Baudrillard, Krauss, Merleau-Ponty and Batchen as well as the works of photographers William Fox Talbot with his botanical photogenic drawings and Minor Whites concept of equivalence. I am also interested in the early botanical photographic prints of Anna Children Atkins and would like to investigate her works further.

My current visual practice is also informed by abstract minimalist artist Agnes Martin as well as the work of Rosalie Gascoigne and Piet Mondrian.

OUTCOMES:

I will continue printing on Arches Rag Paper. I am still to determine final out-put print size. Currently I am working on leaf panel No 5 and continuing with the colored grids. Final project may comprise 6 to 10/12 panels. Finished works are to be hung.

2nd SEMESTER WORK PLAN:

This semester I plan detailed reading and refined research to complete my research project. I plan to continue my exploration in printing on Arches Rag Paper and may consider the use of the larger size 1m by 10m available in roll form.

I am submitting work for exhibition in October as part of the Environment Studio's Gunnedah field trip.

I hope to explore other areas within the university e.g. Philosophy, maybe visit the Botany Dept as well as the Research School of Information Sciences.

I also aim to formulate a research proposal for further study next year.

HONOURS STUDIO PROPOSAL

Title of proposed project – NATURE & BEING

Aim/Subject/Theme of proposal –

The subject of my investigation is to consider the notion of being and relationship through nature and the natural environment. (I propose that in essence this relationship is subject to inner internal consciousness awareness, thought process and experiential understanding.)

My work will depict images of nature and the environment. The abstract nature of the work is to provoke a sense of enquiry and connectedness to the work while also conveying the essence or spiritual element inherent within the work. The images function as a metaphorical reference reflecting the physical and metaphysical aspect within our relationship to nature and the environment.

The aim of this honours project is to refine research skills and establish a contemporary context for my ideas and visual practice. I envisage this project as being a basis for further inquiry and investigation.

My intention is to produce a series of 6-8 mural size color prints as my realised studio project.

Research/Working Process –

The photographic works of Ansel Adams, Olgas Truhanas and Peter Dombrovskis will be drawn upon to inform the conceptual analysis underpinning my project as well as research in photographic/art theory discourse. I am interested in the way photography and the photographic image, are used to inform and reflect to the public, awareness towards nature, the environment and environmental issues.

My working process will be to attend the Environmental Studio field trips to Gunnedah NSW, collect and photograph found natural objects and to photograph the natural environment around Mount Ainslie and Canberra region.

Methods and Materials –

I will be photographing in color - C41 color monochrome film will also be used. I will persist in my past practice of incorporating more than one image to form a completed single image. The process of making layers is an important element due to the abstract rendering and meaning behind the

work. I would also like to incorporate and bring together traditional and digital photographic technologies. To accomplish this I will need to further develop my skill in the use of Photoshop. With my current photographic skill base this will provide a solid technique across varying processes within the photographic medium.

Timeframe -

I envisage semester one gathering visual resource imagery and work in progress prints as well as the collation of research material inherent to my work. I will also need to seek technical advice in Photoshop through the library resources and Photomedia teaching staff. The first field trip to Gunnedah will be April (14-20) and follow up trip June 30 - July 6. By mid-year I would hope to resolve Photoshop working processes whereby semester two to be the focus of a refined work methodology and research follow-up towards completion of project.

Prior Practice and Experience -

I have experience in various photographic techniques - studio photography, fine B&W, colour, darkroom technical skill, camera operation through to large format and exploration in liquid light photography, pin-hole and Polaroid photography.

Early work (c1980s-early90s) and first solo exhibition comprised B&W prints rendered and toned to archival specifications (1994). Recent work is in color and includes varying working processes and is abstract in nature. Past work includes the use of the feminine body as object, as landscape, as lunarscape and the internal/external connection to the land and cosmos.